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**CHRISTIAN AND MINISTERIAL SELF-DENIAL AND FAITHFULNESS
URGED FROM THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.**

2 CORINTHIANS, viii. 9.—*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

THE example of Christ is often urged in Scripture, as a powerful motive to benevolence. It is with his eye fixed on the blessed Redeemer, that the apostle here urges the Corinthians to abound in liberality. He had, indeed, just drawn a powerful argument from the zeal of the poor and persecuted churches of Macedonia; and another, from the faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and diligence of the Corinthians themselves. But the last and most weighty argument is stated in the words of the text: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The context sufficiently determines the signification of the word "grace," as here used. It is "the *kindness* and love of God our Saviour" toward a fallen world.

I can only *glance* at the several topics suggested by the apostle in illustration of that grace which so often warmed his heart, and inspired his tongue: and I would do this, with a view simply to the enforcement of some duties obviously devolving on Christians and Christian ministers of this age.

I. We shall not duly estimate the grace of Christ, without keeping in view the glory he had with the Father before the world was; or the riches he possessed in eternity. "All things," says he, "that the Father hath, are mine." "By him were all things *created*, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers—all things were created by him, and for him." The wealth of the universe, then, was his, by right of creation; and to him it belongs to dispose of all things at his pleasure. Still,

II. "For our sakes he became poor;" and when a certain Scribe said to him, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," he received for answer, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." "He made himself of no re-

putation." His birth-place was a manger; his parental home, a lowly cottage; his chosen associates, unlettered fishermen. The lame, the halt, and the blind followed him; while the rich and the proud despised and rejected him. What insults did he not receive! What cruel mockings and scourgings did he not endure! What greater agonies could he have suffered! Go into the palace of the high priest, the judgment-hall of Pilate, or the sepulchre of Joseph, and behold the depth of his humiliation. And,

III. For *whom* did he humble himself? Well may "God commend his love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us." It was when man had "corrupted all his way before the Lord;" nay, when he had *fallen* under the sword of divine justice; when he lay, polluted in his own blood, in the open field—that Jesus passed by, and said unto him, "*Live*."

Moreover, in the offers of this grace, no respect is had to persons. The invitation is, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come." To the king, and to the slave—to the man clothed in purple and fine linen, and to the beggar laid at his gate, the same overtures of pardon and eternal life are made. But,

IV. What *are* the blessings proposed with such freeness? Verily, "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" To them that believe in Jesus, the Spirit hath said, "All things are yours—whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours." The full extent of these riches can be estimated only in the light of eternity; but we may see something of their bearing on man's dignity and happiness, even in the present world.

1. By Christ we are enriched with the knowledge of the true God. How profoundly ignorant man is of his Maker, till he beholds his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, I need not tell. The history of the pagan world furnishes a most melancholy comment on the boasted strength of human reason; and on the value of that wisdom, which has not prevented men from changing the glory of the incorruptible God, into the image of corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Indeed, many a sad lecture, on the vanity of human imaginations, comes to us from the infinite diversity of speculations on the Divine character, in *Christian* lands. Who that seeks at all, will not seek *in vain*, for a resemblance between the God of the Bible, and the god worshipped by thousands, who claim to be the followers of Jesus! Still, with the revelation of Christ before us, we worship not an unknown God, unless we shut our eyes on Him, who is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

2. By Christ we are taught the *principles* on which pardon and peace are so freely tendered to sinful men. What question is so big with interest—and yet so far beyond the utmost reach of philosophy, *falsely* so called, as that—"How can man be just with God?" It is indeed sometimes thrown out of the account, as unworthy the paternal character of the Deity. But this is not annihilating the question, as it stands on the sacred page; nor relieving the

conscience burdened with guilt. There is a principle within, that impels the mind forward to a day of judgment—and at the same time directs the eye back on a series of offences against God; and wakes up the inquiry—"How shall I stand when He appeareth?"

To Christ we are indebted for a knowledge of the fact, that "God can be just, and yet justify the ungodly;" that "he himself has become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;" that now, there is "no condemnation to them that walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Through him, we obtain "peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost." In the light of his glory we look on the past with penitent composure, and on the future with triumphant hope. His promises encourage effort; his threatenings warn us against indifference. From his example and precepts, we learn to cherish a meek lowliness of spirit—a holy superiority to the fascinations of the world; and a quiet submission to the inscrutable arrangements of Providence. The light he has thrown upon the Divine administration, enables us to hold on our way, exulting in the prospect of triumphing over sin, and death, and hell, and reigning with Christ in heaven.

3. Christ hath enriched us with the privilege of entering into the presence of God, and pleading our cause before him with boldness and importunity. Once we were afar off—but now are we brought nigh. Once God's throne shot forth devouring flame; but now a mild glory hovers over it, and a voice is heard—"Look unto me, and be ye saved." Once the seraphim and cherubim only could approach: but now, the humblest born of earth, on whose heart is impressed the image of Jesus, may draw near with full confidence and hope. Nothing can bar you from this privilege: for Jesus hath purchased and made it over to you, and sealed it by the promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "Let Israel then hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy; and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

4. The grace of Christ, and that alone, teaches men effectually "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world." Nothing else gives victory over those corruptions of the heart, that constrain even the holiest sometimes to exclaim, "O, wretched man that I am!" Nothing else can dry up the fountains of that depravity, which carries misery and discord wherever it goes. But trace the operations of this grace, and you shall find it binding man to man—inspiring abhorrence of whatever tends to disunion, and delight in whatever promotes the knowledge, and love, and happiness of the world. You shall find it grasping the hand of the next-door neighbour, or perhaps of the infant prattler, and directing their eyes to Calvary. You shall find it prompting the intellectual, as well as the spiritual energies of men, to new and mightier efforts for the banishment of evil from the earth. You shall find it infusing wisdom into the preparation, and vigour into the execution of measures, for recovering nations from the region and shadow of death, and placing them among "the nations of them that are saved."

Such is the influence of that grace which we contemplate. And now, who can doubt that the dignity and happiness of man, even in the present world, rise high and advance toward perfection, just in proportion to his acquaintance with the true God, and with that grace which is revealed through Jesus Christ our Lord? And if this be not doubted, who, that has the heart of a man, will not *adore* the grace of Him, "who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich?"

But these views of the riches of divine Grace fall infinitely short of the reality. To know their full amount, we must lift the veil that hangs over eternity—we must fasten our eyes, now on the torments of the damned, and then on the glories of the upper world; we must listen to the eternal wailings from beneath, and to the undying songs of the ten thousand times ten thousand before the throne! Then only shall we begin to appreciate the worth of Christ's humiliation.

From the subject we learn, first, the Christian's high obligations to self-denial. Our great Exemplar withheld not himself from poverty, and shame, and violence, when our salvation was at stake. And who that denies not himself, and bears not the cross, can follow Christ and do him honour? Is it too much to demand of the Christian, that he be crucified to the world—that he mortify his members which are on the earth, and that he withhold himself from every indulgence that unfits him to act vigorously in behalf of a world lying in wickedness?

Feel you, my brethren, an aversion to any known duty?—to the duty of keeping your hearts with all diligence—or of maintaining a spiritual intercourse with your fellow-men—or, of adopting that course of active beneficence which is marked out by the word and providence of God?—To subdue this aversion is the province of self-denial. Or, feel you a propensity to throw away life in *inactivity*—or, in the pursuit of *vain glory*—or, in gratifying a thirst for intellectual acquisitions—or, in collecting those treasures that will perish with the using?—To subdue such inclinations is your immediate and imperious duty, however self-denying. Without such self-denial, you cannot be followers of Him, who, though "Lord of all," "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

We learn, in the second place, the obligations of Christians, to devote themselves to the enlargement of Christ's kingdom.

This kingdom is enlarged, only by withdrawing men from their allegiance to the great enemy of God, and inspiring them with new dispositions and principles of action. And this change of character is produced only through the instrumentality of a preached gospel, and other subordinate means of divine appointment. The maintenance of this instrumentality is committed to the church; and the authority of Heaven binds every Christian to do all that in him lies, to send the gospel to every creature. And if Christ became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich—and if the riches he procured be sufficient to meet the wants of a world—then, every sentiment

of gratitude requires us to publish his salvation, co-extensively with human wretchedness, even, if need be, at the expense of all our possessions, and our lives.

For every hope of heaven that sustains us under the accumulating afflictions of life, we are not more indebted to the sacrifice of Calvary itself, than to the grace that has made us acquainted with the sacrifice, and urged on us its acceptance. Christ had died in vain, but for the revelation of the fact, that "on Him were laid the iniquities of us all." His blood had not washed us from our sins, but for the mission of the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit had not convinced us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, but through the word and ordinances of God, the appointed medium of his operations. True as it is, that "he who believeth not on the Son of God, shall not see life"—it is equally true, that men will not believe except they hear; nor will they hear without a preacher.

And to whom, if not those who have been made partakers of this grace of Christ, is intrusted the mighty work of bringing the world into subjection to his authority? To them surely it belongs to summon enslaved nations from the bondage of spiritual death, and to plant on every mountain and every island, the standard of the Prince of Life! To this labour of love, the authority of God commands—the love of Christ allures—and the worth of souls urges, by all the glories of heaven, and by all the terrors of that world, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

But while the whole church is called to engage in these labours of love, it is obvious that those whom God hath put into the ministry, should be found exerting a most direct and decided influence. To them it belongs to be as God's mouth to their fellow-men—to bring forth from their treasures things new and old, and affectionately, yet faithfully, to give to every man a portion in due season. To them it belongs to preserve a hallowed fire on the altar of the inner sanctuary—to maintain the spirit of devotion ever burning, amid all the storms that may assail, or the winds that may blow upon them, from an ungrateful world.

But the duties of the ministry at the present day, are confined within no narrow bounds. Allow the providence of God to be the interpreter of his will, and who can doubt that the millions of immortal beings brought under the eye, and within the reach of Christian influence, within a few years, but still sitting in darkness that might be felt, have all of them an immediate claim on our sympathies? And if so, who are to be their instructors?—who their guides?—who, but the ministers of God?

The notes of angels have waked a sleeper here and there on the high places of Zion; but mighty armies are yet to be enlisted and trained for the battle of the great day of God Almighty. And in this great enterprise who have so important a part to act, as the ministers of the sanctuary? Are they not the leaders of the Lord's hosts? Are they not justly expected to bring into effort whatever of intellectual vigour, or of hallowed devotion, or of physical energy they possess?

It may not belong to many of them to leave the stations they now occupy,

that they may carry the weapons of their warfare into the thickest ranks of the enemy;—but it *does* belong to them to raise up those who will engage heartily in these hazardous services, and to lead to active co-operation, every individual over whom God has given them influence. It *does* belong to them to do what in them lies for removing that darkness which still hangs over the path of duty—those prejudices which obstruct the march of truth—and all that ignoble spirit of selfishness and hypocrisy which still cries with deafening voice, “For what purpose is this waste?”

And, when in addition to their own labours they have opportunity to avail themselves of the experience and influence of others, in arousing the public mind, shall they not gratefully receive them? Does it ever become them to regard in the light of mendicants, the men, who, impelled by a high sense of duty, devote themselves to the thankless office of urging the claims of God and a perishing world? Shall they join the cry of ignorance and covetousness in deprecating as a nuisance, the man who would help to elevate among them the standard of Christian duty? Would to God there were none who sustain the holy office, that yet can coldly say to such a man—“Go thy way for this time,”—“at a more convenient season I will call for thee!” Oh, how often has the self-denying Agent been palsied in his efforts, and the church defrauded of much of the luxury of doing good, by such ill-timed interference?

But, says the minister who thus sinks himself from the rank of God’s steward, to become the steward and guardian of his people’s money, “My congregation is *poor*—scarcely able to support the gospel among themselves—and how can they contribute to the support of the gospel elsewhere?” Might I reply to such a brother, I would say with modesty, Are your people increasing their wealth by withholding from the Lord? Are they raising themselves to independence, by diverting the bounties of Heaven from the course assigned them by the injunction, “Freely ye have received, freely give?” Will they support the gospel less cheerfully among themselves, if taught by experience that “there is a giving which tendeth to increase?” Would you enrich your people?—teach them the true value of riches. Would you make them habitually generous to yourself, and to the miserable around you?—give them frequent opportunities for the exercise of generosity on a broader scale. Would you attach them most firmly to your person and your ministrations?—point them to the millions who are poorer than themselves; and point them to Him, who, though Lord of heaven and earth, for their sakes submitted to poverty, degradation, and death.

But, again it is said, “My influence will be destroyed—I shall lose the power of doing good among my people, if I show myself so regardless of their interests, as to throw wide open the door to such as would solicit their charity.” Now, allowing this assumption to be true, what is the value of the influence thus lost?—what is the worth of *that* power of doing good, which cannot be exerted, without destroying *itself*? But I venture to say, the assumption is *not* true. Show me the man that ever lost his influence by a frank, enlightened, and bold discharge of duty! Show me the man that was ever

driven from a post of usefulness, in a Christian community, by his zeal to do good, and to engage others to do good to those perishing for lack of vision! Should the case occur, wherein the minister of God urges on his people a liberality, which he himself does not exercise—should he clench his own hand against the claims of a dying world, while he requires them to open theirs, the effect would be—what it ought to be—a conviction of his insincerity—a loss of his influence—and, may I not add too, *the loss of his soul!* Let him withhold the force of his *example*, and he will preach *in vain*, on this, as on every other subject. But let him be *sincere* in the performance of his duty—let him show himself far enough superior to the love of filthy lucre to stake his all on the success of his efforts—and instead of forfeiting confidence, he will inspire *admiration*, and secure to himself a generous support from every man's conscience.

It is further said, in objection to frequent preaching on the subject of *beneficence*, that it diverts the attention of the congregation from subjects that are more intimately connected with vital piety; and that, like other practical preaching, it creates a disrelish for the great and distinguishing doctrines of religion. If it be so, let not the unhappy effect be charged on the *subject*, but on the manner of treating it. That this and every other practical subject may be so handled as to create indifference to the great principles of religion, there can be no question: and that *doctrinal* discussions may be conducted with equal infelicity, there can be no doubt. But, "Thou shalt preach the preaching that I *bid* thee," saith the Lord. And what is the preaching that God requires? If we examine his word, to learn what doctrines and duties are to be inculcated, and in what *proportion* they are to be taught, do we not find, that a generous regard to the wants and woes of mankind, whether in this world or the next, is here repeatedly urged as a duty second in importance only to that of supreme love to God?

It is confessed, that nothing more powerfully awakens the enmity of the natural heart against God, or calls forth louder complaints against the gospel, than a pungent and personal application of the duties which man owes to man: but I have yet to learn, that the summoning up of this hostility is prejudicial to the spiritual interests of a congregation. Indeed, experience shows, that the minister who desires above all things to see the work of God revive among his people, and to give them a clear understanding of the grand principles of revelation, can adopt no course of preaching, that will more certainly convince of selfishness and sin, or more probably conduct to holiness and heaven. This was the kind of preaching addressed by the Saviour himself to the rich and amiable young man whom he loved—"One thing thou lackest—Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor."

But I cannot dwell longer on objections to this branch of ministerial faithfulness. It is grievous to know that they ever enter the head, or pass the lips of any who are set for the defence and confirmation of that gospel which breathes "good will to men." I would, in conclusion, simply state some facts which ought to have great weight with God's ministers of this age and nation:—

It is a fact, that the churches of this country are able to raise hundreds of

thousands, where they now raise thousands, for the cause of benevolence, without impoverishing themselves, or even denying themselves a single comfort of life.

It is a fact that millions are wasted every year upon superfluities that were better dispensed with than allowed—and this too, by those who “follow Him that had not where to lay his head!”

It is a fact, that if our churches were convinced of the duty they owe to the world, they would cheerfully deny themselves the luxuries, and even many of the comforts, in which they now indulge.

It is a fact, that they are not yet convinced of their duty—nor are they sufficiently enlightened: the subject has not been laid before them in all its length and breadth, and urged with that frequency, plainness, and pungency, which its importance demands.

It is a fact, that this indifference will never die a *natural* death—for it derives its support from the strongest passions of corrupt nature; and it requires the most vigorous and persevering application of truth to destroy it.

It is a fact, that ministers are appointed of God to apply the truth—to attend continually on this very thing; and to pour the light of Heaven on minds clouded by ignorance and covetousness. And,

It is a fact, that if ministers neglect this duty, they will not only endanger themselves in the final judgment—but they will mislead the souls committed to their care—they will be instrumental of hardening multitudes in worldliness and sin—of obscuring the hopes of others; and of withholding from millions of their fellow-sinners in heathen lands, that gospel which is able to prepare them as well as us for the great day of God.

And now, who, that admits these facts, will decline or refuse the doing of what may be done, to draw forth the resources of the church, for the salvation of the world? Brethren, the time is short. Soon we shall meet our respective flocks at the bar of God: and if the Judge shall say to any of them, “I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat—I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink—I was a stranger, and ye took me not in—naked, and ye clothed me not—sick and in prison, and ye visited me not—inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these, for whom I shed my blood, ye did it not to me—depart ye cursed;” what will be our emotions, should we hear them reply, “*Lord, we were never urged to this by those who came to us in thy name!*” And should almighty Grace triumph over our sins—should the angel of mercy interpose between us and the wrath we deserve—how far away must we stand from that throne on which Jesus sits, surrounded by the prophets, and apostles, and martyrs of other days? How shall we lift up our heads among the Brainerds, and Martyns, and Halls of modern times, who counted not their *lives* dear to them, so that they might win Christ, and add jewels to his crown?

Never was the field of the world so fairly laid open to Christian cultivation; never were the means of rendering it productive of the fruits of righteousness so ample; and never were the encouragements derived from success so abundant, as at this day. What single enterprise, undertaken in the name and spirit of the Lord, has failed? What single blow has been struck at

the kingdom of darkness, that has not caused gnashing of teeth! Even the labours of infidelity itself, and all the stratagems employed to obstruct the march of truth, have contributed to its furtherance. The wrath of man praises God; and the remainder of wrath is restrained. Surely, the Most High hath girded his sword upon his thigh—and rides forth prosperously in the cause of truth and meekness—commanding all who have enlisted in his service, to go on with him from conquering to conquer, till the nations shall be subdued before him, and till a great voice shall be heard out of heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

SERMON XLIX.

Preached before the Synod of Virginia, at Staunton, Oct. 22, 1822.

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RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTRY AND CHURCH.

1 TIMOTHY iii. 15.—*That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

THE Church of God is undoubtedly the most important institution in the world. It connects itself, in a multiplicity of ways, with all the important interests of man. Were a community sunk in the lowest state of misery; distracted and degraded by every species of vice; the introduction of the pure gospel among them, would immediately renovate their condition; they would rise into a state of order and happiness. On the other hand, should the most moral and happy people apostatize from the faith of the gospel, and fall into gross error, that error would lead to vice, and their best institutions would decline. The truth of these observations is attested by the whole history of human affairs; and yet religion produces these results, not as its principal object, but in an indirect and collateral manner. The great object of religion is to train man for heaven; to prepare him for a state of happiness in worlds beyond the grave. But in preparing him for more perfect happiness above, it necessarily prepares him for happiness in the present state. It is hence a matter of the highest importance to mankind, that the affairs of religion should be wisely conducted. Indeed, among the many wonderful things connected with the gospel, I have often thought it not the least of its wonders, that we should have had this treasure in clay-vessels at all; that a system so evidently from heaven, and so connected with all the important destinies of the world, should have been intrusted, in any degree, to the management of imperfect man. But it has pleased Almighty God to honour his church and

people with a co-efficiency in these matters. His people are appointed to be fellow-workers with him, in bringing about the important purposes of the gospel: and this makes it a matter of unspeakable importance, that every one who sustains an office, or even a private station, in the church, should know how "to behave himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

The text, and the occasion on which we are assembled, will lead us,

I. To consider how we ought to behave, as it respects the preaching of the gospel.

II. To make some general observations respecting the management of the church.

First; *As it respects the preaching of the gospel.* While the church is considered as the pillar and ground of the truth, preaching must, beyond all question, be regarded as its most important duty. When I give this preference, it will not be understood that I mean to speak lightly of Bible societies, or Sunday schools, or any of those recent institutions, intended for spreading the knowledge of divine truth. These are among the glorious works of the church; but the preaching of the gospel by the living voice, is essential to the life and existence of them all, and of the church itself; it has, in all ages, been the principal instrument in the hand of God, by which the church has been sustained and advanced. Without the other institutions mentioned, the church has long existed; and, to some extent, it has prospered. But go into a region where there is no preaching, and there you will find the church languishing, or dead; you will find no Bible society, or Sabbath school; but one general scene of spiritual desolation.

There is such fulness of precept and direction in the word of God, as to preaching, that it would seem at first view no difficult matter to ascertain our duty in this respect. But when we consider the importance of the business, in itself, and the consequences growing out of it—when we consider that a minister must rightly divide the word of truth, giving to every one his portion in due season; and that to every hearer he will be a saviour of life, or of death—we may well exclaim with the apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

There are many ways in which a preacher may fail in the execution of his trust. From inattention, he may be unacquainted with the wants of his people, and of course unable to supply them. The love of ease may prevent the efforts needful to enrich himself and his people with knowledge. But there is another principle, which I think lies at the root of ministerial unfaithfulness; which slides very insensibly into the human heart; and which has produced unspeakable mischief in the church: I mean a disposition to accommodate the truths of the gospel to the prevailing sentiments of the world; or to form a compromise, between the doctrines of the cross and the feelings of the natural heart. Every pious minister, when attempting to preach the gospel, knows that he is about to deliver a message, most ungrateful to the ears of unregenerate men. Indeed there has never been any set of principles, or any system of truth on earth, which the world hates so much, as it hates the pure gospel of Christ. This at first view may appear strange; it is,

in itself, a matter of curious speculation; but it is undoubtedly true. The law of God reveals the condemnation of the sinner; the gospel reveals his redemption; and yet mankind hate the gospel more than they hate the law. In proof of this, it is only necessary to attend to the manner in which our Saviour, and many of his most faithful servants, have been treated. Moses established the law among the Israelites; our Saviour established the gospel among the same people; and yet the Saviour was persecuted with much deeper enmity than Moses. Indeed, there has never been such display of enmity on earth, as was manifested against the Saviour and many of his most faithful disciples. And the only cause of this enmity was, their determination to propagate the gospel. But this enmity of the human heart is the same in every age. And when a Christian minister is fully sensible of this fact; when he knows that the message he is about to deliver, has so much opposition from the world to encounter, he is strongly prompted to change the aspect of that message; and to substitute a little of his own wisdom, for the wisdom of God. And this he may do, in a manner very insensible to himself. It is not necessary, that he should say any thing untrue. He may keep himself within the bounds of orthodoxy; and yet, by insisting on those parts of the system, which are least unpopular, he may keep back those truths, which humble the pride of the human heart; which show the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and which make the sinner feel his entire dependence on the sovereign mercy of God. The same principle of accommodating the doctrines of the cross to the sentiments of the world, has often given rise to the most dangerous speculations and refinements in divinity, and thus led the church into most destructive errors. This has undoubtedly been the cause of that tendency, which the church has manifested, in every age, to turn aside from the simplicity of the gospel.

There have been, as it appears to me, but two periods in the history of the church, in which the pure gospel was extensively preached with becoming pungency and faithfulness. One of those periods immediately followed the resurrection of our Saviour. But it was not long before various mixtures of heathen philosophy were sought for, with a view to make the gospel more acceptable to the world. The other period of pure preaching, was that of the glorious Reformation: and this period too was soon overclouded, and apparently from the same cause. The churches of Germany and France were soon filled with refinements and speculations, by which the purity of divine truth was defaced.

But while a disposition to accommodate the gospel to the taste of the world has perverted the matter of the Christian ministry, it has had a still more injurious effect on the *spirit* of preaching. When the ministry and the church entertain favourable expectations from the world, this insensibly leads to a spirit of formality, and false security. But, on the other hand, when a minister feels that the enmity of the world is against him; and that, unless God is with him to bless his work, both the message and the preacher will be rejected with contempt; then he has the strongest motives to a life of faith and prayer. Under this impression, in his closet, and in the preparation of his sermons, he

will be frequent and earnest in his applications to the throne of grace. And in the sacred desk, all his dependence will be on the blessing of God. I believe that this impression, that help for the dead in sin can only come from God, is the very life and soul of ministerial faithfulness; and I would rather have one sermon prepared in the fulness of effectual fervent prayer, than hundreds of sermons prepared with much study and little prayer. And I further believe, that this impression, that help must be had, and that help can only come from God, whether pertaining to temporal or spiritual things, has been the main-spring of effectual prayer, in every age of the world. It was this impression which gave to Jacob that persevering faith, which would take no denial; "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." This impression has pervaded every church in our own day, immediately previous to a revival of religion. Professors have seen and felt, that the spirit of the world was gaining ground, that piety was sinking in themselves and others, and that, unless God should appear, all would be lost; and this has brought them to a throne of grace, with that humility and holy importunity, which God always approves. It too often happens, indeed, that when a revival progresses with power and majesty, the church soon falls back into self-dependence and security; and then a lamentable reaction takes place.

It is also worthy of particular notice, that all those men, who have been distinguished instruments of good in the church, have been remarkable for prayer. Just as much distinguished for a life of prayer, as for a life of usefulness. This fact has been mentioned of Luther, of Calvin, of Whitefield; and we know it was the case of Paul himself, and of all the apostles. These men were placed in circumstances which made them feel their dependence on God at every step. They saw the church full of weakness, while its enemies were powerful and active. But are we not placed in circumstances which require the same reliance on Almighty grace? Is not the church always weak in itself? Were our eyes opened to perceive all the workings of the human heart throughout the world, we should see the church of God, as it were, on the verge of a volcano; and nothing but that power which governs the winds and the sea, restrains the secret fires of that volcano from bursting forth, and overwhelming every thing sacred.

I have dwelt the longer on this point, as I would, if I could, persuade the ministry, and the church, to withdraw all hopes and confidence from the world, and to rely on God to bless their efforts. I believe this is the first step towards the triumph of the gospel. There is, I believe, a mode of preaching and sustaining the gospel, which will make it completely irresistible. Let the gospel be affectionately preached, in its simplicity, without any compromise; and let it be supported by the faith, and love, and prayers of the church, and nothing will be able to stand before it. Its triumphant march is sure as the promise of God.

I have already alluded to two periods, in which the gospel was extensively preached in its purity; and in both those cases, the church rose from a state of great apparent weakness, to a state of triumph and victory; and the victory continued, as long as the faithful preaching continued.

Had we been present in that upper chamber, to which the disciples resorted

after the crucifixion; had we seen how exceedingly small was the number of the church, without one name of power or influence among them; we should not surely have expected, that the preaching and influence of this little company would so soon have spread the doctrines of their crucified Master throughout the Roman empire. Who would have expected to see the temples of paganism tottering—its philosophers and orators confounded and silenced—and, in the course of a few generations, the invincible legions of Rome marching under the banners of the cross?

Some may perhaps think that modern preaching cannot be expected to be thus successful, because primitive preaching was accompanied by miracles. But it appears to me that undue stress is laid on this circumstantial difference. Miracles were addressed to the understanding; they were intended to attest the divine mission of Jesus—to prove that Christianity was from God; and *not to convert sinners*. It is true, a miracle was performed when Paul was converted, but he was not converted *by the miracle*. The men who journeyed with Paul, saw that great light from heaven; they were struck to the ground; and heard, though indistinctly, the voice which spake to him. They were no doubt confounded, and, for the time, cured of the spirit of persecution; but the history gives no intimation, that they were ever converted. And Paul himself was not converted by the miracle, but by the influence of divine grace on his heart.

It is then plain, that miracles were not intended to convert the heart, but to convince the understanding, and to give to all succeeding ages sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity. This evidence we have now, with nearly as much clearness as they had it in primitive times, and supported by other sources of evidence, which they had not. The truth is, the public mind, throughout the most enlightened parts of the world, is much more fully convinced at this time, that the Christian religion is from God, than it was in the days of the apostles; and we have sufficient means and evidence in our hands, to carry this conviction through all the benighted nations. And there appears no reason to doubt, that if the gospel were preached now, with as much purity and zeal, and supported on the part of the church by the same devotion as in primitive times, the success would be similar. The promise, "Lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," is as full of encouragement to us, as it was to the primitive Christians. The sovereignty of God accomplishes the purposes of the gospel; but it does this in co-operation with human agency; and I do not see how we can understand the promises made to prayer, and to the use of means, in any way which will not throw the blame of the church's failures, and her want of triumphant success, entirely upon her own unfaithfulness.

II. I now proceed to make some general observations respecting the management of the church. And I would first observe, that although the doctrines of the cross ought to be preached with simplicity and plainness, yet it does not follow, that they ought to be preached by ignorant or rash men. Whatever may be true, in particular cases, it is by no means expedient, in the general, that illiterate men should preach the gospel. The blind should not

lead the blind: a novice should not be put into the ministry. Indeed, next to the curse of an unsanctified ministry, there is perhaps no source from which the church, in its different branches, has suffered more than from an ignorant ministry. Omitting many things that might be mentioned here, I will just remark, that the setting up of unscriptural tests and evidences, for judging of the Christian character and conversion, must be traced principally to this source. This is certainly a great evil, in our day; and is lamented by the wise and good of all denominations. In many cases, great stress is laid on certain things, as evidence of Christian conversion, or Christian character, which have little or no connexion whatever with religion; whilst the proper and scriptural evidences of a new heart and character, are almost entirely overlooked. Such mistakes not only lead to delusion and corruption in the particular societies which entertain them, but they fill those societies, with uncharitable sentiments towards others. Judging of other denominations, by unscriptural tests, they must judge wrong, and may be led to denounce, as unchristian, those better than themselves; they may even conscientiously think it their duty to counteract and pull down a society, which is doing more for the cause of truth, than they are doing. With respect to rash preaching, I will just make one remark. Paul was an excellent example of plain and faithful preaching. He declared the whole counsel of God; but he was far removed from rashness. Many cases appear in his history and writings, in which he employed great address, for the purpose of exhibiting the truth, so as to give no unnecessary offence.

In the second place, I would observe, that much prudence and wisdom is necessary in conducting the controversies which must arise between different denominations in the Church. Many persons are of opinion, that there should be no controversy between Christians; that it should all be reserved for infidels, and open enemies of religion. But if this opinion be right, the apostles were wrong. There was frequent controversy in the primitive church. Paul, at Antioch, zealously opposed Peter, rather than permit the cause of truth to suffer; and he often contended strenuously, with Judaizing teachers, whom still he did not denounce as entire enemies to the gospel. So, also, when Luther and his associates began the reformation, those holy men thought the time was come, when not only peace, but life itself, should be hazarded for the cause of truth. No doubt, the love of peace, and the love of truth, are the two great principles which ought to direct in all the intercourse of the church. But if these principles should come into collision, as they certainly may, and often do—the love of peace should yield to that of truth. The love of truth is a principle of paramount authority. When the love of truth is genuine, it is in itself a principle of candour and charity, and will preserve the peace of the church as far as it can with propriety be preserved. But to sacrifice important or fundamental doctrines for peace, is just as bad as to sacrifice them for ease or safety;—but if the truth could have been sacrificed for either ease or personal safety, the church would never have had its martyrs.

But if controversy be necessary, it should ever be conducted in a Christian spirit. And in order to this, in the first place, let every man who calls himself a Christian, lay aside that morbid sensibility, which rises into anger, when any part of his creed is questioned, even in a moderate manner; let every Christian be willing to have his principles questioned, and brought to the scriptural test, whilst there are other Christians who differ from him; and in the second place, let those engaged in controversy, remember that they are not contending for their own honour, but for the honour and cause of God: and let all pride of talents and love of victory, be kept down in religious disputation. Were these plain rules observed—and would Christians, with mutual regard to the rights of conscience, bring forward their differences, and discuss them in the fear of God; such a course might lay a true foundation for the peace of the church; and afford a prospect of removing from it whatever errors may at present exist; and of fulfilling that cheering prophecy, that “the watchmen of Zion shall see eye to eye.”

In the third place, I would observe, that it is the duty of all Christians to discountenance a proselytizing spirit. This is perhaps one of the greatest evils which can enter the church. By a proselytizing spirit, I mean that spirit which substitutes the love of party for the love of truth, and maintains the interests of that party on the principles of mere human policy. Such a spirit in the church is much like party spirit in the state. It is thought, indeed, that some degree of party spirit is useful in free governments; but when it passes its proper limits, all men are convinced of its ruinous tendency. It injures morals; it fills the land with slander and falsehood; and often throws suspicion on the best characters in the nation.

Now whatever effects the spirit of party may produce on the state, the spirit of proselytism will produce in the church—with perhaps this difference, that religion creates more intense feelings in the mind than even politics. How disastrous, then, must the consequences be, when the spirit of proselytism affects even a small part of the church! A few men, of even moderate talents, devoted to this employment, may do more injury, and produce more unseemliness in the house of God, than ten times their number of infidels, though of the most distinguished talents.

In the fourth place, I would observe, that the institutions which have lately arisen in the church, have received less attention than, from their importance, they deserve. These institutions are numerous, comprehending, among others, Bible Societies, Sunday Schools, Tract Societies, Concerts of Prayer, and Missionary and Education Societies, on an extended scale. These, in their united influence, form a most important machinery for the propagation of truth. The church had existed for near eighteen centuries, without these institutions; and yet, when they came into view, they appeared to have so much of the Christian spirit, and were so well calculated to embody, and carry forward, all the principles of the gospel, that we wondered the church should ever have been without them.

The manner in which these institutions arose, also deserves attention. They

evidently came not by the will of man, nor by human device, but by the interposition of God. The first movement in reference to a Bible Society, was a petty attempt to supply with the Scriptures, a few destitute families in a poor neighbourhood; and out of this arose the Bible Society, which now overshadows Christendom, and sends its blessings to the ends of the world. The prime movers in the scheme, intended no such thing. They were the first to wonder at what they had done; or rather to exclaim,—“What hath God wrought?” Similar remarks might be applied to most of the other institutions. Indeed, in their origin and progress, we have more than sufficient evidence to convince the Christian—we have almost enough to convince the infidel—that these institutions are from God. I say we have almost evidence enough to convince the infidel; and I believe I may add with safety, that infidelity has been greatly confounded, by these new appearances in the church.

But it is matter both of surprise and regret, that what has been sufficient to confound infidelity, has not been sufficient to awaken the whole church of God. Some parts of the church, indeed, seem to be alive to the subject; but with us, (to our shame and humiliation be it spoken,) professors of religion are generally asleep. Perhaps, then, the first thing incumbent on us, is to spread the knowledge of these institutions and their operations, as extensively as possible. For when they become fully known, they must, and will, in some measure, form a test of Christian character. They have so much of the Christian spirit, that all who love the gospel will love them, and every true Christian will do something for their advancement. The rich will then give as God has prospered; and those who have little, will still give something. I believe, even now, if it were communicated from heaven to any individual, that the great Head of the church would receive nothing more from him to aid the cause of religion—that God would carry on his own work—raise up and prosper his servants—and fill his own treasury,—but that nothing more should ever be received from him, in aid of the cause,—I believe that such communication would be regarded almost as a death-warrant: that individual would feel as if “God had taken away his part out of the *book of life*, and out of the *holy city*.” Who, then, will wilfully exclude himself from any part or lot in this matter?

These sacred institutions assuredly present a loud call to the ministry, and the church, to raise the standard of exertion in every form. And let it be remembered, too, that, in times of darkness, God might wink at things, which he will not pass with impunity in times of greater light. In this glorious day of the manifestation of divine power, the church is called to act under peculiar responsibilities. Let us, then, my Brethren, here dedicate ourselves anew to God: let us solemnly resolve, that through divine grace, we will stand firm and wakeful at our posts; and let us devoutly look to that God, from whom salvation cometh, to inspire the churches under our care, and all the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, with a spirit worthy of their Master, and worthy of this eventful age. AMEN.